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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

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SUBJECT: EGYPT: EMERGENCY LAW EXTENDED FOR TWO YEARS

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¶1. (SBU) On the afternoon of April 30, Egypt's People's Assembly voted in favor of the government's proposed two year extension of the state of emergency. In a midday address to the People's Assembly, Prime Minister Nazif alluded to last week's terrorist attacks in Dahab, Sinai, as he asked PA members to approve the extension. He argued that the GOE must give security services the tools they need to defend the nation.

¶2. (SBU) In protest, the PA's 88 members from the Muslim Brotherhood, and several other opposition members, attended the session wearing black sashes which read "No to the State of Emergency." Only 278 of the PA's 454 members were in attendance for the vote. Of those, 187 voted for the extension and 91 opposed.

¶3. (SBU) The extension had been widely expected, and indeed was previewed publicly by President Mubarak and other senior GOE officials. In recent years, the law had been extended for three year intervals. Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Mufeed Shehab told the media this would be the last time the emergency law would be extended.

¶4. (SBU) Campaigning for reelection in the summer of 2005, Mubarak committed to rescinding the state of emergency, which has been in force since he took office following Sadat's 1981 assassination, and replacing it with a modern counterterrorism law. Several drafting committees are working on a new CT law, but none of our GOE contacts expect it to be ready this year. Several senior GOE contacts have told us that the constitution will have to be amended to be compatible with an effective CT law.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy civil society contacts, who have long opposed the emergency law, reacted with resignation to news of its extension, noting that the GOE had been clear in indicating its intent to do so.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The state of emergency was set to expire at the end of May. The GOE may have expedited renewal in the wake of last week's terror attacks in Sinai. The GOE's extension by two rather than three years is consistent with its stated time frame for replacing the state of emergency with a modern CT law. End comment.

¶7. (SBU) If asked about the extension, the Department may wish to draw from the following points:

-- The United States has long expressed concern about Egypt's application of the State of Emergency and we are disappointed at its extension;

-- We welcomed President Mubarak's commitment to replace the emergency law with a modern counterterrorism law and we look forward to seeing this commitment implemented as soon as possible;

-- Egypt is a valued ally in the war on terror. Recent events have highlighted the security challenges that it faces.

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